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# HLA NEWS

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## Improve your literature searches with the new SMART SEARCHING MODULES

Sarah Hayman reports on SMART SEARCHING, a free set of online self-paced modules for librarians and researchers who want to enhance their literature searching skills. The resource was developed by CareSearch Palliative Care Knowledge Network, with support from Flinders Filters and Health Libraries Australia as an outcome of the ALIA HLA/HCN Health Informatics Innovation Award in 2012.



The Smart Searching modules provide tips and tricks to enhance literature search

techniques for librarians and researchers, especially in the health sector, who are interested in developing and testing their search strategies.

In 2012, I and the CareSearch team were fortunate to receive the HLA/HCN Health Informatics Innovation Award, recognising the work CareSearch has done in developing topical search filters<sup>1</sup>. We decided that we would use the award to develop a free online resource that would be an evidence-based approach to searching itself. The approach we have developed is designed to help librarians (and interested researchers) to improve their literature searches but also, importantly, to be a way to provide some evidence of the effectiveness of their searches.

It is highly applicable to the health sector, where literature searching is such a key feature of the information work that health librarians undertake, and we have provided examples of searching the medical literature. However it is an approach that it is widely applicable to literature searching in other subject areas and we hope it will be useful beyond the health sector.

The tips and methods we suggest are derived from the detailed model we use at CareSearch to develop the topical search filters we create and publish<sup>2,3,4</sup>. It would not be

possible to teach the full model in a resource like this, but we have taken elements of our process and generalised them.

The resource, called *Smart Searching: Logical Steps to Building and Testing Your Literature Search*, can be found at <http://sites.google.com/site/smartsearchinglogical/home>

The resource is in four modules, which follow logically on from each other, but could also be worked through separately. Each module describes the process,

Continues on p2...



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### INside

- Introducing the Smart Searching modules – Sarah Hayman 1
- Convenor's focus – Ann Ritchie 3
- HLA 2014 Executive Committee List 4
- Handing on the baton – Cecily Gilbert 5
- Emerging technologies in medical libraries – Ingrid Tonnison 7
- Gratisnet update – Mary Grimmond 8
- Member spotlight – Lyndall Warton 9
- ALIA 2014 Conference – Health stream announcements 11
- HLI/HLA joint conference – Conversations on the theme and link to online registrations 12

demonstrates how it might work with a scenario and then provides a small quiz. The four modules deal with the four main methods we suggest:

- Collaboration with subject experts
- Development of a sample reference set
- Term identification through frequency analysis
- Testing performance of candidate search strategies

We suspect that these approaches are very likely already being used to some extent by reference librarians but perhaps not always recognised or formulated as we suggest here. The methods can be adapted and only partially adopted, as people see fit and find useful for their own circumstances. Introducing any element of testing and feeding the test results back into search improvement will be valuable.

We also believe that applying an evidence-based approach to our literature searching will strengthen librarians' knowledge about their own expertise. This will provide evidence to support the presence of librarians in systematic review teams, and for individual librarians to use in demonstrating effectiveness. It is vital to understand how effective a search is when medical decisions may depend on its results.

The resource is free to use and self-paced, available online. A login is not required.

Health librarians have a high degree of skill in literature searching and we hope this will provide a way not only to enhance it but also demonstrate it.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of my colleague Yasmine Shaheem for significant assistance with editing and ideas and scenario development. Thank you too to the expert advisory group who provided very valuable suggestions for final improvements to the modules before publication. We are very grateful for the support from CareSearch and Flinders Filters for this project, and to ALIA HLA and HCN for the award that inspired and facilitated the resource development.

I am pleased to be able to report that in the first four days after the website was released, Google Analytics showed there have been 708 sessions from locations worldwide (see Figure 2).

We would be pleased to receive comments and suggestions.

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FIGURE 1 – Smart Searching landing page.

Country / Territory ?	Acquisition	
	Sessions ?	↓
	708	
	% of Total: 100.00%	(708)
1. Australia	226	(31.92%)
2. United States	150	(21.19%)
3. United Kingdom	122	(17.23%)
4. New Zealand	72	(10.17%)
5. Canada	58	(8.19%)
6. Norway	16	(2.26%)
7. Netherlands	13	(1.84%)
8. Sweden	13	(1.84%)
9. Ireland	4	(0.56%)
10. India	4	(0.56%)

FIGURE 2 – Google Analytics, sessions by country, 30 May 2014.

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